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## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

November 20, 2009

Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport  
Ministry of Health Services  
Ministry of Education

### **FOR PARENTS: H1N1 AND BACK-TO-SCHOOL**

British Columbia continues to monitor the H1N1 flu virus situation in the province. Many cases have been confirmed in British Columbia and the vast majority of these patients have either recovered or are recovering.

#### **Q: What are the symptoms of H1N1?**

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include high fever, cough, headache, general aches, sore throat, fatigue, eye pain, shortness of breath and, in younger children, lack of appetite.

Some people with the H1N1 flu have also reported runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

#### **Q: What precautions should I take to help prevent my child from getting sick?**

As very young children (under the age of 5) and children with chronic health conditions may be at higher risk for more severe illness or complications from the H1N1 flu virus, parents should take them to visit their doctor to make a plan for what to do if they become ill with influenza.

This may include discussing with your doctor whether they should be prescribed antivirals ahead of time to use in the event they show H1N1 flu symptoms and where to call to get medical advice.

It's also important all parents review with their children the standard hygiene and prevention measures and other common sense measures that can help protect them from getting the flu, including:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you don't have a tissue, try to cough or sneeze into your sleeve rather than your bare hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze and before you eat. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also effective if your hands aren't visibly dirty.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread more easily with contact to these areas.
- Don't share the same cup or utensils with other people.
- Encourage children to tell you if they don't feel well, and to stay home from school if they are sick.
- Be a role model! Adults should make sure they wash their hands properly and sneeze into a tissue or their elbow to set a good example for kids.

**Q: Should my child receive the vaccine?**

All British Columbians who need and want the H1N1 vaccine are now eligible to receive the vaccine. For adults, one dose of the vaccine will be sufficient while children under 3 years old and those aged 3-9 years old with chronic conditions will need two doses.

People who choose to receive the H1N1 vaccine and for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended will be able to receive both shots at the same time, if the seasonal vaccine is available in their area.

**Q: My child is 6 months to 9 years old – how many doses should he/she get?**

The Public Health Agency of Canada has updated its recommendations on H1N1 flu vaccine dosing for children between 3 years and 9 years of age. These recommendations apply to adjuvanted vaccine, which is the recommended vaccine for children under 10 years old.

The updated recommendations include three components:

- Children between 6 months of age and under 3 years of age should receive two half-doses of adjuvanted H1N1 flu vaccine, administered at least 21 days apart. Guidance for children in this age group is unchanged.
- Children with chronic health conditions who are 3 to 9 years of age should receive their first half-dose of the H1N1 flu vaccine as soon as possible. They should also receive a second half-dose of the H1N1 flu vaccine. The interval between the two half-doses should be a minimum of 21 days. Guidance for children in this group is unchanged.
- Healthy children between 3 and 9 years of age should only receive a single half-dose of the H1N1 vaccine, and do not need to return for a second vaccine for now. This is a new recommendation and may be further updated as more information becomes available.

These updated recommendations reflect findings from clinical trial results from Europe that show a single half-dose of adjuvanted H1N1 flu vaccine for healthy children provides an acceptable level of protection from infection from the H1N1 flu virus.

Further adjustments to the vaccine dosage recommendations may be made once the results of additional research and clinical trials on vaccine effectiveness are available.

**Q: Will taking only one half-dose of pandemic H1N1 vaccine mean that children might be protected for a shorter time than if they take two half-doses?**

There is currently no data on the duration of immunity following immunization and we will need to wait for results of further research. This is why we are monitoring it closely and if there is an indication that immunity wanes quickly after a single half-dose, a recommendation for a second half-dose will be reconsidered.

**Q: My child is between 10 and 18 years (inclusive) – which vaccine should he/she get?**

Any healthy child aged 10 to 18 years (inclusive) is now eligible and recommended to receive one full dose of either H1N1 vaccine. For children in this age range with chronic medical conditions, the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine is preferable.

**Q: What should I do if my child has the flu?**

Unless they need medical attention, keep children who are sick at home. Don't send them to school or day care.

Have them drink frequent small amounts of liquid (juice, soups, water, Pedialyte®). Keep the sick child comfortable. Rest is important.

For fever, sore throat, and muscle aches, you can use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor recommends based on your child's age. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers. If someone in your home is sick, keep them away from those who are not sick. Keep tissues close to the sick person and have a trash bag within reach for disposing of used tissues.

**Q: If my child is sick with the flu, how long should he or she be kept away from school and work?**

The best thing you can do if your child or any member of the family is sick with an influenza-like illness is for them to stay home from school and daycare and stay away from other people until they are feeling better and able to fully participate in normal activities.

If your child gets sick, be sure to keep him/her home from school or daycare until they are no longer showing symptoms.

**Q: Will schools be closed to limit the spread of the H1N1 flu virus?**

Based on the experience to date about the current H1N1 situation, public health officials in B.C. do not anticipate that closures of individual schools, community-wide closures, or province-wide closures will be useful for controlling the transmission and impact of the H1N1 flu virus.

Public health officials are watching this virus very carefully and while more people are expected to get sick, right now most people have recovered at home without having to go to hospital.

Provincial health officials are encouraging students, parents and schools to continue taking practical, common sense steps to prevent the spread of illness. It's also recommended that students, teachers and staff who are sick stay at home to reduce the risk of spreading infection.

As with any flu or illness, the key is to be aware of the symptoms and, if children get sick, keep them home until they're feeling better.

**Q: Who decides if schools get closed?**

If there are unusual circumstances that call for a school to be closed, this would be a decision made by the local Medical Health Officer in consultation with the Provincial Health Officer and local school district.

**Q: Last year there were some school closures due to H1N1 outbreaks. How come these same situations might not result in closures this year?**

Closures early last spring were done out of an abundance of caution because there was very little information on the disease at that time. It has since become apparent that, in general, the H1N1 flu virus does not warrant such severe measures.

School closures are very aggressive measures to reduce influenza transmission. While they may be used during periods of uncertainty as a precaution, they have not been established as effective in the control of influenza.

**Q: Should my child use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer?**

While alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be a useful supplement when soap and water are not available, it's important to note that they do not replace simple hand washing. Research has shown that vigorously washing your hands with soap and water is a more reliable and effective way to keep your hands clean.

If hands have visible dirt on them then alcohol-based hand sanitizers don't work as well and may not kill the influenza virus.

**Q: My child came home from school saying things are much worse than health officials say they are. What can I believe?**

Public health officials are watching this virus very carefully and while more people are expected to get sick in the next few months, right now most people have recovered at home without having to go to hospital.

If things change, public health officials will let everyone know and provide advice on the things to do to stay well.

You can call [HealthLink BC](#) at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week to speak to a nurse if you have more questions or are concerned about any illness/symptoms you're experiencing.

To find out where to get your H1N1 flu vaccine, use the Flu Clinic Locator at [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca). For the latest facts on the H1N1 flu virus, visit [www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1](http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1).

